REMARKS

ON THE

NATURE AND NECESSITY

OF A

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

BY

WILLIAM BELSHAM.

Hoc opus, hoc ſtudium, parvi properemus & ampli,
Si patriæ volumus, ſi nobis vivere cari. HOR.

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AMONGST the many great and intereſting political queſtions, which have been agitated of late years in this country, the moſt important is certainly that which relates to the propriety and neceſſity of a reform in the preſent ſyſtem of repreſentation. For if the legiſlative body be itſelf imperfectly, or defectively, conſtituted, a multiplicity of political evils muſt inevitably flow from a fountain originally corrupt. And it is doubtleſs of far greater conſequence effectually to eradicate the cauſe, than to provide a remedy for any of the ſpecific miſchiefs or inconveniencies reſulting from it. The queſtion is in a great meaſure novel, and it is not yet, perhaps, ſufficiently familiarized to the great majority of the nation, to enable them to form a calm, impartial, and accurate judgment reſpecting it.

From the æra of the revolution, it is univerſally admitted by hiſtorians and political writers of all parties, that a ſyſtem of regal influence was gradually ſubſtituted by the new government, for that high and imperious exerciſe of prerogative, by which the kings of the Houſe of Stuart attempted in vain to ſubvert the liberties of this country, and which, at length, terminated in their own ruin. Various efforts, at various times ſubſequent to that period, were made, with unequal ſucceſs, to eſtabliſh the integrity and independency of parliament upon a ſolid baſis, and to ſtem that tide of corruption, which threatened in its progreſs, as many of the beſt and wiſeſt members of the community apprehended, to undermine the foundation of that fabric of liberty which bade defiance to the open aſſaults of power. In the reign of K. WILLIAM, the duration of parliaments, at that time indefinite, was limited by the Triennial Act to three years, greatly, as is well known, againſt the inclination of that monarch. Landed qualifications, alſo of an high amount, were required of the members of the Houſe of Commons, by a ſubſequent act of Q. Anne, which, however laudable in its intention, was, in the opinion of many, both an injudicious and ineffective remedy. Members of parliament accepting offices under the crown, by another and earlier regulation of the legiſlature, unqueſtionably juſt and proper, vacated their ſeats in conſequence of that acceptance; and members receiving penſions from the crown during pleaſure, were abſolutely

ſolutely incapacitated from ſitting in the Houſe. The Triennial Act was indeed repealed in the reign of K. Geo. I. and the Septennial Act paſſed, by an extraordinary and alarming exertion of legiſlative authority, at a criſis, it muſt be confeſſed, of urgent danger to the ſtate. But, during the twenty years of Sir Robert Walpole's adminiſtration, repeated and zealous efforts were made by the patriots, in oppoſition to the court, to procure the revival of the Triennial Act, to limit the number of placemen in the Houſe of Commons, and to exclude penſioners, of all claſſes and deſcriptions, from ſitting in parliament. So unſucceſsful, however, or ſo inefficacious were all theſe different meaſures, that in our own times, and at a period of ſo late a date, as to be yet recent in the recollection of moſt perſons, the Houſe of Commons, impelled by the force of irreſiſtible *conſcious conviction*, declared by a ſolemn vote, that "THE INFLUENCE OF THE CROWN HAD INCREASED, WAS INCREASING, AND OUGHT TO BE DIMINISHED." And with the general approbation of the nation, efforts were actually made—faint and feeble efforts indeed—to reduce this dangerous influence within proper and conſtitutional bounds, by the abolition of certain places and offices under the crown, by the excluſion of public contractors from the Houſe of Commons, and by the disfranchiſement of certain deſcriptions of revenue officers. Notwithſtanding theſe acts, the operation of which was prodigiouſly over balanced by the vaſt acceſſion of patronage which accrued to

the Crown by the India Bill of Mr. Pitt, by the aſtoniſhing increaſe of the civil and military eſtabliſhments, and the enormous addition, within a very few years made to the national debt, it ſtill remains, at leaſt, as true as ever, " That the influence of the crown ought to be diminiſhed." The American war being evidently continued, by the mere ſtrength of that influence, long after it had become odious to the nation, it began, at length, to be clearly perceived, that the only effectual mode of accompliſhing that diminution, without reſorting to raſh and violent expedients, was by a A RADICAL REFORM IN THE SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATION, which, though it does not appear to have occurred to the patriots of elder days, was now recommended and urged by various political writers of diſtinguiſhed reputation and ability, in ſo powerful a manner, as greatly to exite the attention of the conſiderate and reflecting part of the community. And Mr. Pitt, the preſent miniſter, then in oppoſition, brought forward a motion in the Houſe of Commons, (May 1782) for an enquiry into the ſtate of the repreſentation, which was ſo forcibly ſupported, both within and without the walls of that Houſe, that on a diviſion, the queſtion was loſt by a majority of twenty voices only. Amongſt other ſtriking and excellent obſervations of Mr. Pitt, in ſupport of this motion, he declared his belief, " That there was no member of that Houſe who would not acknowlege, that the repreſentation, as it now ſtood, was incomplete. It was perfectly comprehended,

prehended, that there were ſome boroughs under the abſolute influence of the Treaſury, and which had no one quality of repreſentation in them. There were other boroughs, under the patronage of ſome lord, or great man, whoſe repreſentatives alone the members of ſuch boroughs could be accounted. Another ſet of boroughs claimed to themſelves the right of bringing their votes to market. Far from conſulting the intereſts of their country, in the choice which they made, they held out their boroughs to the beſt purchaſer; and in fact, ſome of them belonged more to the Nabob of Arcot, than to the people of Great Britain. Would any man ſay, that in this caſe there was the moſt diſtant idea or ſhadow of repreſentation? Mr. Pitt expreſſed his apprehenſion, that the reverence and enthuſiaſm which Engliſhmen entertained for the conſtitution, might eventually be the means of deſtroying the conſtitution, if they determined not to touch its defects, leſt they ſhould endanger its excellencies. Such defects as theſe affected the radical principles of the conſtitution, and to remove them would not be innovation, but reſtoration. In theſe ſentiments he knew that he concurred with many of the greateſt and wiſeſt characters this kingdom could boaſt, and particularly with his much honored father, the late Earl of Chatham, who was firmly of opinion, that a reform of the repreſentation was abſolutely requiſite for the ſecurity of the liberty of the people in this country." And that upright and diſintereſted patriot, Sir George Saville,

who zealouſly ſupported the motion of Mr. Pitt, beautifully compared the conſtitution of this country, "admired and venerated as it univerſally was, to an antient oak, which he had obſerved, not long ſince, upon his eſtate, green and flouriſhing, and in appearance perfectly ſound; but on paſſing this tree he ſaw a hole or two in the trunk, which led him to a cloſe inſpection of it, when it was found *rotten within*—the heart of the tree being changed by an internal and inviſible decay into mere touchwood." Far from being diſcouraged at the failure of this firſt attempt, Mr. Pitt pledged himſelf, never to loſe ſight of the object, but to uſe his utmoſt efforts, both as a man and a miniſter, to ſecure the ultimate ſucceſs of it.* Conformable to this declaration, in the enſuing

* Truth, however, requires the acknowlegement, that Mr. Pitt appears to have incurred unmerited cenſure from the ſtern and rigid zealots of reform, for propoſing a parliamentary indemnification to the proprietors of the burgage tenure boroughs, and others of a ſimilar claſs, which, by his plan of reform, were no longer to return members to parliament. We know, that by almoſt univerſal conſent, theſe boroughs have, in fact, been long conſidered as a ſpecies of property, though certainly not recognized as ſuch by the law. We know that men of the higheſt reputation, for honor and probity, have, without ſcruple, been concerned in purchaſes of this nature. And there is certainly no more moral depravity in the purchaſe of a ſeat in the parliament of Great Britain, however *politically unfit*, than in the parliament of Paris, or the other parliaments of France, as was, previous to the late revolution in that kingdom, commonly and legally practiſed. Large ſums have been given for eſtates thus circumſtanced, on the preſumption of the continuance of the preſent ſyſtem; and though there

enſuing ſeſſion he renewed his exertions, though in a mode by no means ſatisfactory to the majority of the friends and advocates of parliamentary reform: Alleging, that as his former motion for the appointment of a committee of enquiry had been rejected by the Houſe, he now thought it neceſſary to come forward with a ſpecific propoſition, and he therefore moved for an addition of an hundred members to the county repreſentation. This propoſition was negatived, as may eaſily be imagined, by a much larger majority than the original motion, which there was every reaſon to hope, might in preſent circumſtances have been carried, it being evidently the right and proper mode of entering into the inveſtigation of this arduous and complicated buſineſs. Thus then this matter reſted, or rather ſlept, for more than ſeven years, till the aſtoniſhing revolution effected in France, excited a ſpirit of political examination and enquiry in the minds of very many perſons in this country, accompanied, no doubt, with reſpect to numerous individuals, and even ſocieties of men, whoſe general rectitude of intention there is no ground to queſtion, with very wild and viſionary

there can be no claim on the *juſtice* of the nation for an indemnification, the validity of the title never having been acknowleged, the refuſal of it would certainly operate as a ſevere hardſhip on individuals, a circumſtance, which in the execution of plans of general reform, muſt ever give pain to the generous mind. Policy alſo ſeems to dictate the expediency of paying ſome attention to claims of this nature, as tending to leſſen the weight of the oppoſition to a parliamentary reform.

ideas of government, and with a fondneſs for political experiment and change, utterly incompatible with ſound policy and diſcretion; and, perhaps, not entirely conſiſtent with a regard to the national peace and ſafety.

It is not neceſſary to ſay, how ſenſibly theſe ideas were foſtered by the bold and extravagant reveries of a man, who could never have attained to any diſtinguiſhed degree of reputation as a writer on general politics, had not the minds of a great part of the nation been previouſly irritated, and alienated, by the obſtinate adherence of the government of this country, to the wretched policy of teſt laws*, excluding men

* At the period when the teſt laws originated the prerogative of the crown was extremely formidable. It was within the limits of juſt apprehenſion that the ſovereign might attempt by an exertion of power, to impoſe his own religion upon the conſciences of his ſubjects. This we know Charles II. made a comparatively feeble and impotent, and James II. a violent and deſperate effort to accompliſh. In theſe circumſtances, a teſt, however odious or unjuſt, as a permanent meaſure of policy, was of evident and indubitable importance and neceſſity; but at the æra of the revolution, the conſtitution aſſumed a new and highly improved form. The prerogative of the crown was completely diveſted of its *terrors*. Never more could the will of the monarch be oppoſed with effect to the will of the nation. The victory of liberty was, in this view, deciſive. To perpetuate laws therefore, of this deſcription, as a barrier againſt attempts now rendered morally and politically impracticable, is to convert the ſenſeleſs chimæras of folly, into pretences for injuſtice and oppreſſion. As long as human nature remains what it is, oppreſſion and perſecution on the one ſide will, and muſt produce reſentment and animoſity on the other. In the celebrated

men on account of religious diverſities of opinion from the rights of men and citizens; and their diſcontents, yet more recently inflamed, by a publication juſtly celebrated for the ſplendor of its eloquence, but containing reflections in the higheſt degree abuſive and malignant, upon all thoſe who approved of and rejoiced in the ſubverſion of the ancient deſpotiſm of France; and inculcating ſentiments unheard of for a century paſt in this country, and which rendered the book *a libel upon all free governments**.

"Suppoſing,"

celebrated orations of Mr. Fox, introductory to his ſeveral motions for the repeal of the teſt and penal laws—In Mr. Whitbread's excellent ſpeech, on moving a parliamentary enquiry into the Birmingham riots, and in the admirable concluding ſpeech of Mr. Grey, in the debate which aroſe on Mr. Whitbread's motion, not to particularize thoſe of various other diſtinguiſhed members, are to be found juſt and noble ſentiments of government, and maxims of civil and religious polity, calculated to produce the moſt beneficial effects: Such doubtleſs as this country, notwithſtanding the utmoſt efforts of bigotry and prejudice, will one day be convinced that it is her intereſt, her honour, and her happineſs to adopt;—however the diffuſion of them may be retarded by the efforts of a miniſter, who bears a NAME ſacred to liberty, and whom we once hailed as the *MAGNÆ SPES ALTERA ROMÆ.*

* The notion promulgated by Mr. Burke, after lying many years dormant, "that queſtions of ſtate ought not to be agitated by common minds," reſts, it muſt be acknowleged upon high and remote authority. The Britiſh Solomon K. James I. in a ROYAL PROCLAMATION, iſſued A. D. 1621, commanded his ſubjects "on their allegiance, not to intermeddle by pen or ſpeech with ſtate "concernments, and ſecrets of empire, either at home or abroad, "which were *not fit themes for vulgar perſons.*" When, however, Mr. B—— expreſſes ſo much loyal indignation and reſentment at

hearing

"Suppoſing," ſays an excellent writer, Sir Brooke Boothby, "that the theory of the French revolution had excited any fanatical admiration in this country, what could be more injudicious and ill-timed, than to

hearing the king ſtiled "the ſervant of the public," he goes a ſtep beyond James himſelf, for this monarch, in anſwer to an addreſs of the commons, A. D. 1603, ſays. "that I am a ſervant of the ſtate "is moſt true—I will never be aſhamed to confeſs it my principal "honor to be the great ſervant of the commonwealth." In the ears of Mr. *B*——, doubtleſs the oriental appellations of "roſe of beauty," and "nutmeg of delight," ſound far more decorous and rational. In the famous publication of Mr. Paine on the Rights of Man, it muſt be acknowleged, notwithſtanding the utter contempt of decorum, and the ſpeculative abſurdities which characterize it, that many groſs political abuſes ariſing out of the preſent enormous ſyſtem of corruption and extravagance are attacked with extraordinary vigour and ſucceſs. This book, however deficient as an argumentative treatiſe on government, is calculated to make a powerful and permanent impreſſion on the public mind; and it poſſeſſes, in an eminent degree, that animation and ardor, without which judgment is of no avail, and knowlege has no efficacy. On the other hand, under a thin veil of benevolence, an envious and malignant mind is very diſcernible, cheriſhing, for whatever cauſe, a ſecret and inveterate hatred to Great Britain. It ſhould ſeem, that "he had rather be a canker in the hedge, than a roſe in her grace." Not perceiving, or not caring to perceive, that if there are great evils in the ſtate to be remedied, there are far greater evils to be avoided, and that it ſhould be the primary concern of reformers not to make a diſadvantageous exchange of evils, he knows no medium between reformation and ſubverſion, reparation and ruin. To adopt the Shakeſperian language and imagery he, looks with anticipated delight,

"As doth a raven o'er a ſick-fallen beaſt,
"On all the vaſt confuſion that awaits
"The imminent decay of wreſted pomp."

excite

excite and irritate this paſſion by the angry perſecuting heat of ſuch a work as the Reflections? The Reflections preceded and provoked the *Rights of Man*; and whatever miſchief is produced by the latter, muſt be ultimately referred to the former. Anger generates anger, and intemperance begets intemperance. By the colliſion of zeal againſt zeal, the train is ſet fire to, and the voice of reaſon is utterly ſtifled in the noiſe and confuſion. To charge men with mere terms of abuſe, requires, or evinces no ſuperiority of any kind. Such appellations as "infamous gang," "wicked faction," "tyrannic impoſtors," "incendiaries," "aſſaſſins," "houſebreakers," "robbers," ſuch epithets as "foul," "impious," "monſtrous," "ſavage," "barbarous," "treacherous," "wicked," "cruel," "clumſy," "ſtupid," &c. &c. may always be hurled back upon the adverſary with more force than they are at firſt employed, becauſe the uſage of them is juſtified by example." In this critical ſtate of the public mind, when the nation was manifeſtly deviating every day more and more into two very oppoſite and dangerous extremes, it was judged expedient by many of the moſt judicious advocates and FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE, to eſtabliſh an aſſociation, which ſhould have for its ſole object a reform in the repreſentation.—Preſuming that this great object once attained, every neceſſary and beneficial alteration would be gradually accompliſhed by the wiſdom and authority of the legiſlature in a regular and conſtitutional method. They hoped that the utility of this

meaſure

meaſure was ſo well aſcertained, and reſted upon ſuch high authority, as to reſcue them from the reproach attending the character of violent and reſtleſs innovators on the one hand; and on the other there appeared a fair probability, that when a grand and ſpecific conſtitutional object was propoſed to view by perſons of diſtinguiſhed rank and influence in the community, the different political ſocieties already formed, would be content to relinquiſh their viſionary, however well-meant projects, and to concur in the proſecution of a plan which comprizes in it the ſtamina, and would ſecure the future growth of every ſafe and practicable improvement. This aſſociation included amongſt its firſt founders, many individuals, not leſs diſtinguiſhed for their character and abilities, than for their rank and ſituation in life. It was not poſſible to ſuppoſe that ſuch men could knowingly entertain deſigns inimical to the community of which they formed a part. It was ſcarcely poſſible that they could harbour deſigns really injurious to the public, without being apprized of their nature and tendency. In order that the attention of the nation might be fully awakened, and the public mind duly prepared for the inveſtigation of the ſubject. Mr. Grey, a leading member of the aſſociation, and whoſe ſuperior talents as a member of parliament, are too well known to need any encomium, gave notice in the Houſe of Commons in the month of April laſt, of his intention to bring forward in the courſe of the enſuing ſeſſion, a motion on the ſubject of parliamentary

tary Reform, which it is underſtood, is to be ſeconded by Mr. Erſkine. The miniſter in a very vehement ſpeech, inveighed againſt the indiſcretion and temerity of this deſign in the actual circumſtances of the kingdom; and went the very extraordinary length of ſaying, that he would rather give up every hope and expectation of a parliamentary reform, than yield his aſſent to a motion ſo unreaſonable and fraught with ſuch danger. In a very ſhort time after this, A ROYAL PROCLAMATION was iſſued of an extraordinary nature, complaining of the propagation of ſeditious principles and writings, and ſtrictly commanding all magiſtrates, and others, to give information to his majeſty's miniſters of perſons ſo offending, in order that they might ſuffer condign puniſhment. The houſe being moved for an addreſs to the king, thanking his majeſty for this inſtance of his paternal care and goodneſs, a warm debate aroſe, in which the miniſter was charged with an inſidious and intereſted deſign of exciting internal feuds and contentions in the kingdom, in which no ſymptom of diſorder exiſted to juſtify ſo unexpected and unprecedented a meaſure, of endeavouring to awaken the dormant but dangerous ſpirit of political animoſity and rancor, in order to intimidate the friends of liberty, to counteract their efforts, and to create a colorable pretext for repreſenting thoſe who were aſſociated for the purpoſe of obtaining a Reform in Parliament as enemies of the conſtitution, and in bitter terms reproached with apoſtatizing from his own original

and

and avowed principles. Mr. Pitt on the other hand expreſsly declared, and with every *appearance* of fairneſs and candour, "that the aſſociation alluded to did not come within the *ſcope and purview* of the proclamation*, and in vindication of his integrity and conſiſtency, he affirmed, that he retained in their full force the ſame principles which he had ever profeſſed, reſpecting the expediency of a parliamentary reform, though he could not admit this to be the

* It happens however rather unfortunately for the credit and conſiſtency of the miniſter that his confidential friends and coadjutors in the Upper Houſe, Lord Abercorne, Lord Grenville, &c. made no ſcruple to affirm that the inſtitution of this aſſociation was the immediate cauſe or occaſion of iſſuing the proclamation in queſtion. If ſo, the proclamation can be conſidered in no other view than as an inſidious political manœuvre calculated and intended to caſt an unmerited odium upon a ſociety formed for the expreſs purpoſe of counteracting the projects of raſh and viſionary reformers, by directing the views and efforts of the *Friends of the People*, to the accompliſhment of a great conſtitutional object which the beſt and wiſeſt men in this country have concurred in conſidering as eſſential to the proſperity of the nation, and the ſecurity of its liberties. It is extremely to be regretted that perſons of high diſtinction and reſpectability of character, and whoſe names would do honor to any cauſe, after deliberately entering into an aſſociation of this nature, ſhould precipitately withdraw from it upon ſlight and trivial grounds, fixing by this means as far as their influence extends a ſtain upon the reputation of the ſociety. To enter or not into ſuch aſſociation is a matter perfectly free and optional. Not to break off the connection, after having once engaged, excepting for juſt and adequate cauſe, becomes a point of honor and ſocial obligation. By a fickle and capricious deſertion the wideſt ſcope is given for the ſlanderous inventions of falſehood and malice.

proper

proper time for reviving the conſideration of it." To a miniſter of ſtate, doubtleſs, any time for the purpoſe of making motions of reform, muſt be expected to appear preferable to the time preſent; but the plea of danger, ariſing from any internal agitation, any diſpoſition, or tendency, to tumult in the nation, was urged with a very ill grace by the man who had deſcribed the kingdom, in his ſpeech at the opening of the ſeſſion, as in a ſtate of profound tranquillity, and in all reſpects flouriſhing and proſperous beyond all former æras. The only rational doubt, in fact, as to the propriety of the time, was ſuch as Mr. Pitt had probably little inclination to urge, viz. Whether, in conſequence of the temporary confuſion and diſorder which had unhappily reſulted from the late revolution in France, a diſlike of innovation, even the moſt juſt and beneficial, might not ſo pervade the minds of a majority of the people in this country, as to render them indiſpoſed at preſent, to favour any reform, however, once popular.

Had the motion however met with the concurrence and ſupport of Government, it is very improbable that any ſerious alarm would have been excited by it. But the determined oppoſition of Mr. Pitt was evidently calculated to excite that national alarm and perturbation, which, there may remain a ſuſpicion at leaſt, he would be afterwards eager to urge as the grand and primary cauſe of that oppoſition. If it ſhould be aſked, what are the mighty evils which flow from that influence of the Crown, for which a

reform

reform in the repreſentation of the people is believed to be the only adequate remedy, it may be replied, in a few words, the predominance of a ſpirit of regal pride and ambition in the national councils, diſplaying itſelf in an almoſt uninterrupted ſeries of wars for almoſt a century, a conſequent inattention and comparative indifference to the domeſtic and internal concerns of the kingdom; a peace eſtabliſhment, including the civil liſt, of 6 millions*; a national

* For a long ſeries of years it was a chief object of the efforts of the patriots in parliament to effect an abolition, or reduction at at leaſt, of the ſtanding army, now engrafted as it were, by a fatal complaiſance to the crown, into the political ſyſtem. Why ſhould a ſtanding army be deemed more neceſſary now than in the reign of Elizabeth? The arguments originally urged in defence, or rather in excuſe, of it have long ceaſed to exiſt: and there is certainly no reaſon, *in the nature of things*, why the whole expenditure of the civil and military eſtabliſhment at preſent ſhould exceed the limits deemed by the legiſlature juſt and proper, previous to the æra of the revolution, when it was reſtrained to the ſum of two millions. That "ſlaviſh acquieſcence" which it was many years ago foretold would be the ultimate conſequence of the habitual continuance of this grand conſtitutional grievance, ſeems now very generally to have taken place. The people have been induſtriouſly taught to direct their reſentment againſt thoſe who are ſolicitous to meliorate their condition, and to relieve their diſtreſs. They have long been the dupes of the game, and, as in the comedy of the Alchymiſt, they are angry with the man who is anxious to undeceive them.

Since this remark was written, a ſtriking illuſtration of its truth has been exhibited in the admirable expoſtulatory addreſs of Mr. Walker, of Mancheſter, publiſhed in conſequence of the late popular tumults in that place. "Whom," ſays that excellent citizen, "have I injured, or what offence have I committed? If there be

tional taxation of 17 millions, of which the dire effects are ſeen in a diſſolute, impoveriſhed, and miſerable commonalty, ſupported, not by the fruits of their own induſtry and economy, but by a compulſive and oppreſſive contribution of two additional millions annually levied upon the public. In the higher claſſes of the community, the effect of the ſame enervate and corrupt ſyſtem is ſeen in the rapid and alarming increaſe of diſſipation, luxury, and a

no charge againſt me, why have I been thus attacked? If it be a crime to endeavour to enlighten the minds of the people reſpecting their juſt rights, I have been guilty of this crime, and to the end of my days I ſhall live in the commiſſion of it. Is it a crime to glory in the title of being the *friend of the poor?* I am guilty of it, for I do and ſhall ever glory in a title ſo reſpectable. Is it a crime to wiſh the more indigent members of ſociety eaſed from ſome of the numerous taxes which they pay in the purchaſe of every neceſſary of life? To wiſh them better lodged, and better fed, and BETTER INSTRUCTED? I am guilty of theſe crimes. Is it a crime to wiſh the Britiſh conſtitution reſtored to its original purity, and the whole ſyſtem of repreſentation freed from perjury and corruption? Of this too I am guilty. Of every good wiſh to mankind and to my country, I am guilty. If the laws of the land have been violated by my conduct, let me be puniſhed *according to law*—But let not the character of the Britiſh nation be ſtained by the baſe and illiberal perſecution of one of its moſt ſincere well-wiſhers."

Far be it from me to inſinuate, that the preſent miniſter has purpoſely or inſidiouſly countenanced, for ſiniſter ends, theſe infamous and deteſtable outrages. But I will ſay, that it behoves him ſeriouſly to conſider how it comes to paſs, that under the adminiſtration of a PITT, the ſpirit of a SACHEVEREL has been revived, and whether there is not juſt room to ſuſpect ſome grand and radical error in that ſyſtem of policy which has been found productive of effects ſo pernicious and fatal.

prevailing indifference, or rather contempt for the great ſanctions of morality; together with a diſpoſition becoming every day more faſhionable, to treat all ſubjects, however intereſting and important, in a ſtile of levity and ridicule, and to repreſent all pretenſions to public virtue and public ſpirit as romantic and chimerical. To theſe evils we may add, that a national eſtabliſhment, profeſſing to inculcate and enforce the divine truths of our religion, and which ſo far as it conduces to this great and ſalutary purpoſe muſt ever be the object of juſt veneration, is in danger of falling into the contempt of the ſerious and intelligent, from the accumulation of errors and abuſes, long the ſubject of regret to its more enlightened members, but of which it is in vain to expect a reform, till a previous reformation has taken place in the ſtate, with which it boaſts ſo ſtrict and intimate an alliance.* We know that while the preſent

* If ſays Lord Bacon, St. John were to write an epiſtle to the church of England, as he did to that of Aſia, it would ſurely contain the clauſe, "I have a few things againſt thee." But the ingenuous and excellent Jortin tells us, "that in this opinion he cannot perfectly concur." "I am afraid," ſays he, the clauſe would be, "I have *not* a few things againſt thee." To obviate miſapprehenſion, however, it may be proper to ſtate that the nature of the eccleſiaſtical reform I would wiſh to recommend perfectly correſponds with that ſo ably enforced in a tract aſcribed to a nobleman, not more diſtinguiſhed by the elevation of his rank than the dignity and liberality of his ſentiments: and in a vindication of this tract by a prelate univerſally regarded as one of the chief ornaments of the epiſcopal bench. As to the revenues of the church

preſent weight of regal influence oppreſſes and reſtrains the volitions of the legiſlative body, theſe evils will not only continue, but continue to increaſe, till at laſt a general convulſion may be neceſſary to relieve the country from burdens which muſt become in a ſucceſſion of years abſolutely inſupportable, and which a wiſe and timely caution only is now wanted to avert. Under a beneficial and enlightened government, it is inconceivable to what heights of dignity and of happineſs a nation, enjoying the advantages which we poſſeſs, might ariſe, but to which it is impoſſible it ſhould attain, under the preſent all pervading ſyſtem of influence and corruption.

It is true, we are frequently told that the nation is in a ſtate the moſt flouriſhing and proſperous. But this aſſertion I believe to be hazarded with very little knowledge of the real interior ſtate of the kingdom. If there be juſt reaſon to affirm, that the bulk of the community enjoyed, in the times preceding the revolution, much more eaſe, comfort, and happineſs than at preſent, the kingdom, unqueſtionably upon the whole, was in a far more proſperous ſtate

church, which are ſometimes repreſented as exorbitant, the ſame prelate has clearly demonſtrated, that they are not in the aggregate more than adequate to the juſt and honourable ſupport of the national eſtabliſhment; and every approach towards equalization (for abſolute equalization is obviouſly a chimera) ought to be proſpective only, and ſuch as no individual ſhould be injured by, for the ſpirit of reform in a free nation ought to be combined with a ſpirit, not of ſtern ſeverity, not even of harſh and rigid juſtice, but of humanity, generoſity, magnanimity.

a century ago than it now is, notwithſtanding the eſtabliſhment of a free conſtitution in this country, from which the lower claſſes of the people have hitherto, in my opinion, derived very little advantage indeed. In conſequence of the revolution, and as a moſt fatal appendage to it, this nation has been engaged in a ſeries of wars, ſupported at an enormous expence, by impoſitions the moſt grievous and oppreſſive. But it merits remark, that the creation of a national debt, bearing intereſt, is in fact the creation of a new and artificial ſpecies of wealth, of which an artificial and proportionate meaſure of poverty is the neceſſary concomitant. And the rich ſtockholder is a man who fares ſumptuouſly and luxurioufly upon the produce of taxes levied upon indigence and miſery. The great extenſion of foreign commerce, and may we not add, the avidity and licenſe of foreign plunder, have alſo been the means of increaſing the wealth of individuals to an enormous amount: and it muſt be allowed, that at no former period did ſo great a number of families live in a ſtile of ſuch ſplendor. There are alſo very many perſons who enjoy lucrative places under the government, or who, in ſome mode, derive great pecuniary advantage and emolument from their connection with it; and who thrive in proportion as the public burdens increaſe. All theſe different claſſes of men talk much and loudly of the flouriſhing ſtate of the kingdom. But thoſe who are converſant with the middle and lower ranks of the community, who have viſited the cottages,

cottages, or rather the *hovels* of thoſe ſtiled in the language of ariſtocratic inſolence, " the ſwiniſh multitude," are ſenſible of the fallacy of this flattering but fatal deluſion. There is nothing in which thoſe who have attended to the ſubject, and who are moſt competent to judge, are more perfectly agreed, than that the *labouring poor*, who form the ruſtic baſe which ſupports the grand fabric of ſociety, were never in a ſtate ſo truly diſtreſsful as at preſent. The great influx of wealth, by reducing the value of money, while the hire of the labourer continues nearly the ſame, has been to them highly and obviouſly detrimental. The whole ſyſtem of poor's laws, which was originally and humanely intended for their relief, is become the inſtrument of their oppreſſion. Expoſed to all " the ills that fleſh is heir to," the victims of parochial and municipal tyranny, periſhing with nakedneſs and famine, they are conſoled, ſhall we call it, or inſulted, with the declaration that the country they inhabit was never in ſo flouriſhing a condition. But for one, I never can, I never will admit, *that* to be national proſperity which is conſiſtent with ſuch diſplays and ſuch increaſe of national wretchedneſs.* Near a century ago, when the ruinous

* The general ſyſtem of policy purſued throughout the preſent reign, in which, during a peace of thirteen years, ſeven millions were ſubtracted from, and during a war of ſeven years, one hundred and twenty millions were added to the public debts, and the annual ſum of ſix millions to the public taxes, may ſerve to remind us of an anecdote, related by the oriental writers of a certain emperor

ous ſyſtem of funding was in its infancy, the famous Dr. D'Avenant declared, that "whenever this kingdom ſhould be arrived at that period of ill conduct, as to pay five or ſix millions per annum, we might venture to pronounce that the common people of England would then grow as poor and as miſerable as the common people of France." At this day, more than three times that ſum is raiſed upon the people of England in a time of profound peace; and the general effect produced by this enormous taxation, is perfectly conſonant to the ideas of that excellent citizen and politician. Not that the ſove-

peror of Perſia, who, as we are told, had a vizier deeply verſed in the occult ſciences, and amongſt other curious ſecrets, perfectly acquainted with the language of birds. The emperor being one day walking in the gardens of the palace of Iſpahan with the vizier, happened to hear a great chattering between two owls, perched on a high tree at ſome diſtance; and commanded the vizier to give him an account of the converſation. The vizier being a man of diſcretion, ſeemed at firſt reluctant to comply; but the emperor being only the more eager for the gratification of his curioſity, the vizier was compelled to acknowlege, that the ſubject of this converſation was a treaty of marriage negotiating between the ſon and the daughter of theſe two owls. "I expect," ſaid one of theſe owls to his companion, "that you give your daughter, as a portion on the day of marriage, ten ruined villages." "Ten ruined villages!" exclaimed the other owl with emotion, "inſtead of ten I will give her fifty. God grant long life and health to Sultan Mahmoud, for ſo long as he lives there will never be any want of ruined villages." The Perſian annals affirm, that from this period the Sultan employed himſelf ſeriouſly and earneſtly to rectify the former errors of his government, but this part of the ſtory being contrary to the uniform analogy of hiſtory, may be conſidered as wholly incredible and fabulous.

reigns

reigns who have ſwayed the ſceptre of theſe kingdoms, ſince the æra of the revolution, or the miniſters employed by them, have, in reſpect of general rectitude of character, ſunk below the level of their predeceſſors or contemporaries—far from it. But ſuch is human nature, and ſuch the certainty and preciſion with which moral cauſes operate on human affairs, that it may be aſſumed, as an infallible maxim, that in ſituations, where power is liable to abuſe from the perpetual recurrence of temptation, there power will be abuſed. Nor will it be always perceived by the individuals who are placed in theſe exalted and hazardous ſituations, how far their actions deviate from the genuine ſtandard of rectitude. At the beſt, they will ſatisfy themſelves with acting as political expediency, viewed through a falſe and deluſive medium, may require: and at all events, they will be able to take refuge in the imagination, that the plenitude of their wiſdom will compenſate to the public for the deficiency of their virtue.

But we perpetually hear it ſaid, "the defects of the preſent ſyſtem of repreſentation are indeed eaſily pointed out, but who will pretend to aſſign the proper remedy? An alteration does not neceſſarily imply an improvement in the ſyſtem; and we ought to be well aſſured, that greater evils will not reſult from any ſpecific plan of amendment or reform, than thoſe which we now endure, and of which we know the full extent." This language is indeed ſo far founded in wiſdom, that it muſt be acknowledged of indiſ-

penſible importance, to conſider, with the moſt calm and deliberate attention, the nature of the remedy propoſed, and the general effect which it is calculated to produce. And on this head, I am ready to confeſs, that my ſentiments are in perfect accordance with thoſe of the greateſt ſtateſman of our age and nation,* who has declared himſelf of opinion, that no adequate or ſatisfactory plan has yet been exhibited for obviating this great political evil. If, however, the theoretical defect of the preſent ſyſtem, and the practical evils reſulting from it can be made clearly to appear, it is the part of national wiſdom to deviſe a remedy. And till an accurate inveſtigation has taken place, and the attention of Parliament has been particularly and ſeriouſly directed to this ſubject, it ſurely is not for any individual to affirm, that no remedy can poſſibly be found. The moſt blind and exceſſive admiration of the Britiſh conſtitution will ſcarcely carry any one to the length of aſſerting, that leſs than 6000 men ought to chooſe more than one half of the repreſentatives of nine millions of people—that ſeats in the legiſlature are, with advantage to the public, "bought and ſold as com-

* FOXIUS eloquii noſtro Demoſthenis ævo
Unicus adſertor; et libertatis amator
Unicus; et nondum venalis! Plaudite cives!
Plaudite magnanimum concivem! Plaudite verum
Humani juris ultorem; et ducite plauſus
Ter ternos, donec reboabunt voce Columnæ.

mon

mon as cattle in a fair"—that the executive government can claim, on any ground of reaſon, the virtual appointment of a large proportion of the legiſlative body—that the borough of Old Sarum, conſiſting of a ſingle tenement, ought to return as many members to parliament as the city of Weſtminſter or the county of York—that the confuſion and riot attending the preſent Gothic mode of conducting popular elections are favourable to the general peace and tranquility. Theſe are ſoleciſms which no man can ſeriouſly attempt to defend. It is evident that they are the anomalies of a ſyſtem irregularly and fortuitouſly formed; and to ſuppoſe that no human ſagacity is competent to rectify theſe glaring political abſurdities, is an aſſertion which requires not leſs effrontery to utter than patience to hear.

In alluſion to theſe pernicious influences and prepoſterous inequalities, a late celebrated political writer and divine, in the language of patriotic indignation, ventured to ſtile the preſent ſyſtem "a ſhadow and mockery of repreſentation;" for which, amongſt other *ſenſeleſs aſſertions*, he has been ſtigmatized by Mr. Burke as "a political theologian, or theological politician, equally ignorant of the character he left and of that he aſſumed," and ſcurrilouſly reviled as the genuine ſucceſſor and counterpart of the wretched fanatic, Hugh Peters. But a leſs extenſive knowlege of hiſtory than that poſſeſſed by Mr. Burke might have ſuggeſted to his recollection, "a political theologian, or theological politician," of another deſcription,

deſcription, whoſe character and writings bear, in the general eſtimation, a much cloſer analogy to thoſe of Dr. Price; I mean the famous Father Paul, who was in his day regarded by the enlightened part, not only of his own countrymen, but of Chriſtendom at large, as "the Apoſtle of Liberty;" who, in his memorable conteſt with the Court of Rome, vindicated the civil and religious rights of the ſtate of which he was a member, and virtually of all mankind, with ſuch reſplendent ability and ſucceſs, as to ſhake to their very foundation the pillars of that ſanctuary of prieſtcraft and ſpiritual uſurpation. The VENETIAN SENATE not being, as it ſeems, converſant in Mr. Burke's maxims of ſtate policy, thought it no degradation of their dignity to aſk the advice, and to be guided by the counſels of this ſimple friar, in the moſt difficult and critical emergencies. Like the venerable patriot whom Mr. Burke has made the object of his malignant abuſe, he had the ſatisfaction to ſee a diffuſion of knowlege, to which he had eminently contributed, undermining ſuperſtition and error. And it is recorded of him, that, in the latter period of his life, he was often heard to repeat, or, as Mr. Burke would ſtile it, "to prophane," the beautiful prophetic ejaculation, *Lord now letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace, &c.* And feeling his ruling paſſion ſtrong in death, he breathed out his laſt ardent wiſhes for the ſafety and proſperity of his beloved country with Roman energy, in the words

ESTO PERPETUA.

In

In the further diſcuſſion of this ſubject, I ſhall take the liberty of offering ſuch hints as have ſuggeſted themſelves to my mind, reſpecting the moſt eligible ſyſtem of repreſentation, as adapted to the circumſtances of this country. Suppoſing the eventual probability of a radical parliamentary reform, it is evident that the cardinal points to which it is neceſſary to advert, in forming a ſyſtem of repreſentation, are population, riches, and extent of territory. Theſe the conſtituent aſſembly of France have ſtiled the three BASES of REPRESENTATION; but to which Mr. Burke has been pleaſed to aſſert, that "no one in England pays any regard out of a few giddy clubs." But if theſe are not circumſtances which merit attention in forming, or reforming, a ſyſtem of national repreſentation, it would be great goodneſs and condeſcenſion in Mr. Burke to inform us by what conſiderations, political, metaphyſical, or moral, we ought to be guided. A few perſons indeed, miſled by erroneous metaphyſical notions, have maintained, that every man poſſeſſes an equal and inherent abſtract right of ſitting and voting in the great council of the nation, by himſelf or his immediate repreſentative, and that the repreſentation ought to be founded ſolely on the baſis of population. But every ſyſtem of morals and metaphyſics is deluſive and dangerous, which does not found civil and political right upon the baſis of expediency or utility.

"The rights of man in ſociety are his advantages," as Mr. Burke has truly told us; and that ſyſtem of government

government approaches neareſt to the ſtandard of perfect rectitude which ſecures the greateſt number of advantages, and is productive of the greateſt ſum of happineſs. It is not abſolutely neceſſary then to confine our views merely to the circumſtance of population, if the general intereſts of the community require other circumſtances to be attended to. And the excluſion of certain claſſes of the community from the rights of elective franchiſe, if there exiſt good and valid reaſons, grounded on the general intereſts for ſuch excluſion, is perfectly compatible with the juſteſt ideas of liberty, provided that the general ſyſtem of repreſentation is ſuch, as by a virtual comprehenſion to include the general maſs of citizens, to afford them in their ſeveral ranks and capacities an equality of protection and ſecurity, and a full enjoyment of their civil and religious rights.

The grand axiom of equitable government is this, that as all men are naturally equal, all civil or political inequality ſhould be founded on the baſis of public utility. If then any claſs of citizens be diſqualified in a moral view by extreme ignorance, groſs venality, abject dependance, or any other cauſe, from exerciſing the privilege of voting in the elections of thoſe who are to guide and govern the great concerns of the community, they have no more right to complain of the injuſtice or hardſhip of not being permitted to nominate the rulers of the ſtate, than of the injuſtice of not being allowed to rule the ſtate in perſon. On the general principle, that no diſtinction

ſhould

ſhould be made but what is grounded on ſome reaſon, all are entitled to this privilege, excepting thoſe who would exerciſe it in a manner injurious to the ſociety of which they are members, and ultimately therefore to themſelves. But if this exception be admitted as juſt, the plan once propoſed by ſome viſionary reformers in this country, and which has attracted more notice than it deſerves, by having received the ſanction of a nobleman high in rank, and at this time high in office, I mean the Duke of Richmond, may be ſafely conſigned to neglect and oblivion. And the grand queſtion remains to be conſidered, what plan or ſyſtem of national repreſentation would, in the actual circumſtances of the country, be productive of the happieſt and moſt beneficial effects? It muſt be admitted, that in the introduction of any innovation, by way of improvement, into an eſtabliſhed ſyſtem of polity, care ſhould be taken not to deviate farther from antient modes and cuſtoms than the neceſſity of the caſe requires. Therefore, to recommend a ſyſtem ſuch as is now adopted in France, ſuppoſing it in theory the moſt perfect hitherto deviſed by the wit or wiſdom of man, would not in this country be judicious, becauſe the deviation is greater than is neceſſary to ſecure the end propoſed. The antient diviſion of counties in this kingdom, though ſtrangely unequal, is not attended by any ſenſible inconvenience. We want no new territorial arrangements: and the evils for the prevention of which the intermediate delegation of electors is

provided

provided in France, may perhaps be as effectually guarded againſt, by precautions better adapted to the opinions and prejudices of Engliſhmen. And certainly no one, without neceſſity, would wiſh to eſtabliſh a bar of this nature between the electors and the elected, in a free country. Alſo, though population be not the *only*, I moſt readily admit that it is the leading, or *primary* principle to be attended to in the formation of a ſyſtem of repreſentation; ſo that however modified by circumſtances, it ſhall ever be kept in view, and no farther deviated from than the general advantage of the community may be promoted by the occaſional co-operation of other principles to the ſame grand purpoſe. Conformably then to this general idea, let us ſuppoſe the entire population of the kingdom, as divided into its ſeveral diſtricts, accurately aſcertained, and the number of repreſentatives proportioned to the population of each county: it is manifeſt, that the neceſſity of a modification of the general principle would become immediately viſible. For upon this plan the county of Middleſex, together with the metropolis, including more than a million of inhabitants, would be entitled to ſend an 100 members to Parliament. And this great body of delegates, being deputed by a claſs of men reſiding within ſuch narrow limits, would certainly carry with them into the legiſlative body attachments, and prejudices, by no means conſiſtent with the public good. A powerful local intereſt would be perpetually oppoſed to the general intereſt,

and

and as the ſame evils, though in an inferior degree, would reſult from the adoption of the ſame abſtract principle in other parts, where the population of the kingdom happened to exceed the uſual level, a combination of local intereſts would in all probability take place in the aſſembly of repreſentatives, by which the general intereſt would be in perpetual danger of being overpowered and oppreſſed. By the introduction of local and excluſive privileges, the whole nation would, in a ſucceſſion of years, be virtually divided into ſeparate communities. Mutual jealouſies and enmities would inevitably ariſe from this ſtate of things—the equity and juſtice of the legiſlative body would be no longer relied upon—no common centre of union would remain, and the fancied abſtract perfection and harmony of this ſyſtem would be productive of the moſt deplorable practical diſcord, and wretchedneſs. Let then a juſt regard be paid to the other great concomitant principles of contribution and extent of territory, and the evils reſulting from an excluſive adherence to the principle, or baſis, of population will be corrected, and removed. A large and extenſive province, which contains within it all the different ranks and orders of citizens, though inferior in proportionate population to many ſmaller diſtricts, is much leſs likely to harbour local prejudices, or to be influenced by a regard to local intereſts. Reſpect, therefore, in apportioning the claims of repreſentation ſhould be paid to extent of

territory

territory in that province, as it may be far more ſafely entruſted with the appointment of a larger number of repreſentatives, than a ſmaller diſtrict including within its juriſdiction great and populous towns, which will neceſſarily be actuated by more partial and contracted views. A regard alſo to the principle of contribution or revenue, as well as extent of territory and population, is highly equitable and juſt. Not that any reſpect is due to the claims of thoſe commercial claſſes of citizens who pay indeed large ſums into the public exchequer under the denomination of cuſtoms, or exciſe; but who are themſelves repaid, no doubt, with intereſt, by levying proportionable contributions on the conſumers of their commodities.

But it muſt be admitted that of two diſtricts equal in point of population and territorial extent, if one really and without any commercial fallacy, contribute in a two or threefold proportion to the other, towards the pecuniary neceſſities of the ſtate, ſome regard ſhould be paid to its relative and ſuperior importance in the ſtate. The degree of attention due to this principle muſt undoubtedly be regulated, and reſtrained, by that ſupreme regard which watches with unceaſing ſolicitude over the general welfare. But ſurely the general welfare itſelf is advanced by the advancement of individuals, to an higher rank and conſideration in the ſtate, in proportion as they contribute by their ſuperior affluence to the general

proſperity.

proſperity.* It may be objected "that theſe principles of repreſentation, allowing the propriety of them,

* In the conſtitution of the Roman republic, the two principles or BASES of contributionand population—for territorial repreſentation was not under that conſtitution at all adverted to—were blended, or rather comprehended in a manner ſtrikingly ſingular. In the COMITIA CENTURIATA, the people voted according to their *cenſus*, ſo that the higher claſſes, when unanimous, or even the firſt claſs alone, determined the whole, and, with the authority of the ſenate, eſtabliſhed a law. In the COMITIA TRIBUTA, the votes were equal, and the ſanction of the ſenate not being there requiſite, the lower claſſes of the people gave law to the ſtate. As however the real power of this latter aſſembly greatly preponderated, the political competition, eſtabliſhed by the conſtitution, operated not in fact to the prejudice of the ſtate, but on the contrary ſerved, on many occaſions, to reſtrain the violence of the democracy. Nevertheleſs, it muſt be confeſſed that the antients, though animated by all the enthuſiaſm of liberty, were very defective theoriſts on the ſcience of government. The conſtitutions both of Rome and Athens were replete with political errors and abſurdities. But what ſyſtem, founded on the love of liberty, is not infinitely preferable to deſpotiſm? The characteriſtic defect of thoſe celebrated conſtitutions, was their incompatibility with the permanence of public order; their characteriſtic excellence, was the unbounded ſcope they afforded to every ſpecies of perſonal and intellectual exertion. They were governments in which patriots, heroes, and philoſophers, ſeem of indigenous growth. I am far from ſuppoſing that the general ſyſtem of repreſentation, recommended, or rather ſuggeſted in the preſent tract, is the beſt which could be deviſed, though it is perhaps the beſt which the people of England are at preſent able to bear. Doubtleſs an incomparably more eligible plan would be for all cities and boroughs as ſuch to relinquiſh entirely their rights of election: and for the freeholders and houſeholders, in conjunction, to chuſe repreſentatives for the diſtrict or county only. And

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them, afford no certain data, on which to eſtabliſh an equal ſyſtem of repreſentation. Any one of theſe principles, unconnected with the others, it may be ſaid, affords indeed a baſis on which an accurate calculation may be grounded, and a ſyſtem perfectly conſiſtent with itſelf be eſtabliſhed. But by admitting the validity of all, we introduce confuſion and incoherency into the general ſyſtem—the radical poſitions on which it reſts are at everlaſting variance, and there is no criterion by which the juſt modifications of theſe diſcordant and oppoſing principles can be aſcertained, or the reſult of their conjunct force be eſtimated." In anſwer to this objection, it muſt undoubtedly be admitted, that this politica *rule of three*, this grand complex problem of ſtate, admits neither of arithmetical or geometrical preciſion. It leaves much, nay in fact it leaves every thing ultimately to judgment and diſcretion, for it founds all political right upon political utility. And that utility muſt itſelf be determined by reaſon and judgment. By the term *equal repreſentation*, cannot certainly be intended a repreſentation, ſtrictly and literally equal in all reſpects, and in all imaginable points of view, for this is manifeſtly impoſſible. A repre-

that men of inferior rank and fortune, but not of inferior knowledge or talents, might not be precluded from the proſpect of a ſeat in the legiſlature, the antient cuſtom of allowing a reaſonable gratuity or indemnification to the repreſentative, for the expence neceſſarily incurred in the diſcharge of his office, ought unqueſtionably on the adoption of this ſyſtem to be revived.

ſentation founded on the baſis of equality of population, cannot be equal in reſpect to extent of territory and revenue. A repreſentation, on the baſis of territorial equality, cannot be equal in reſpect of population and riches. And a repreſentation, founded on the equality of property, cannot be equal in reſpect of population and territory. Mr. Burke might therefore have ſpared himſelf the pains of adducing ſuch *elaborate proof*, that the repreſentation of France is not perfectly equal in all the various ſenſes of equality. Human wiſdom, in this caſe, can do no more than combine the different principles of repreſentation in ſuch proportion, as ſhall, upon the whole, be deemed moſt effectually to ſecure the grand object of repreſentation—the liberty and happineſs of the community.

The principles of action proper for a nation to aſſume, are perfectly analogous to thoſe by which the conduct of every reaſonable agent ought to be directed. In all ſituations of moment and difficulty, we feel the force and energy of various diſtinct and perhaps oppoſing principles. Our volitions, if rational, are determined by the conjunct force of the ſeveral motives which prudence and wiſdom ſuggeſt. And it would be juſtly deemed the height of abſurdity, to counſel a man to attend only to one particular conſideration in an affair of urgency, becauſe to combine it with other conſiderations of equal, or nearly equal importance, would lead to a confuſed or incoherent deciſion. Doubtleſs, both in private

and public life, we muſt view and review the leading meaſures of our conduct, in connection with all thoſe circumſtances by which they can be materially affected. And after all, we muſt not truſt to any *iſolated* abſtract principle for guidance and direction, but to our own diſcretion on a general ſurvey of principles, as applicable to particular ſituations and circumſtances, without being abſurd enough to expect, that the rectitude of our determinations will admit of mathematical demonſtration. There are, undoubtedly, rules of action, both political and moral, which are, properly and ſtrictly ſpeaking, immutable, becauſe they are manifeſtly founded on the baſis of reaſon and utility :—That the great end of government is the happineſs of the people ;—that the people are entitled to all that liberty which is conſiſtent with happineſs, and all that power which is conſiſtent with liberty, are juſt and incontrovertible maxims of government. But in applying theſe principles to practice, great and unavoidable differencies of opinion will ariſe, in determining wherein the happineſs of the people really conſiſts, what degree of liberty is really conſiſtent with happineſs, and what degree of power is compatible with liberty, as diſtinguiſhed from licentiouſneſs and diſorder. General abſtract truths, however clearly perceived and univerſally acknowledged, will contribute little to the ſolution of practical queſtions like theſe ; and our opinions muſt be gradually, and are often inſenſibly formed, by the compariſon and contemplation of a

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multiplicity of circumſtances, none of which can pretend to the force of demonſtration, though all contribute to ſtrengthen and confirm the general proof. In the diſcuſſion of all points of ſtate policy, we muſt content ourſelves with a preponderance of probability, and be ſatisfied to act upon the firm perſuaſion of it. But there is no error more fatal in government, and to which, it muſt be confeſſed that, many of the preſent race of reformers have ſhewn themſelves dangerouſly prone, than to lay down as axioms certain principles, which, properly explained and modified, cannot, perhaps, be juſtly controverted, and to inſiſt that theſe principles or axioms ſhould be carried into immediate and univerſal effect, without regard to difference of opinions, habits, ſituations, or circumſtances. And it cannot be denied, that amongſt this claſs of men, perſons may poſſibly be found, whoſe ignorance and preſumption bear, at leaſt, an equal proportion to their honeſty and zeal. There is, as Mr. Burke has truly ſaid, a fanaticiſm in politics as well as in religion, and the prevalence of ſuch a ſpirit is no leſs to be dreaded and deprecated in the one than in the other. But if no attempts at reformation, either in church or ſtate, are to be made, till the race of religious and political fanatics is wholly exterminated, the rulers of both, in what degree ſoever they may abuſe their authority, will probably remain unmoleſted for centuries to come, on "their thrones and couches of preferment." Suppoſing, however, the nation en-

 tirely

tirely convinced of the utility and expediency of a reform in the national repreſentation, and that the parliament ſhould in conſequence enter ſeriouſly into the conſideration of a ſpecific plan of reform, the firſt ſtep which it ſeems neceſſary to take, is to aſcertain, *all circumſtances conſidered*, the juſt proportion of repreſentatives from each particular county;—the next, to determine what places, in conſequence of this plan of reform, ſhall be diveſted of, and what inveſted with the privilege of ſending repreſentatives to parliament;—and then to fix the qualification of the voters, and the mode of voting. It ſeems equitable and juſt, that one and the ſame rule ſhould pervade the whole kingdom, and that all houſeholders, renting tenements, which may be ſuppoſed to place them upon a level with freeholders of 40s. per annum, ſhould be admitted to the privilege of voting. The mode of election ought to be by ballot, the election throughout the whole kingdom to begin and cloſe in one day, and effectual means adopted to prevent both canvaſſing and treating in any poſſible ſhape or form. As the term of delegation is at preſent almoſt univerſally acknowleged to be unreaſonably long, and the inconveniencies attending the frequent recurrence of popular elections, as at preſent conducted, have formed the principal argument in favor of the Septennial Bill, triennial elections would be in courſe reſtored as a material branch of this reform. But a very important queſtion here occurs—Upon what principle of equity or

utility

utility can thoſe houſholders be excluded from the right or privilege of voting, who inhabit towns or villages which do not happen to return members to parliament? It would be eaſier, certainly, to deny, than to diſprove the poſition, that perſons of this deſcription ought to be inveſted with the privilege of voting for ſome contiguous borough, ſituated in the county or hundred in which they reſide. Upon this plan, all freeholders of 40s. per annum, would enjoy the privilege of voting, and all houſholders occupying tenements of ſuch a value as to place them in the balance of juſtice and equity, on a level with the loweſt claſs of county freeholders. The order and decorum of elections would be preſerved by the excluſion of thoſe by whom it can never be wiſely or impartially exerciſed; the dignity and independency of parliament would be effectually reſtored, and, as there is reaſon to hope, permanently ſecured. The aggregate number of electors would be greatly multiplied, and their rights fully and peaceably enjoyed. Under this new arrangement, the landed qualification of members, the excluſion of placemen, and the disfranchiſement of particular claſſes of citizens, would become wholly unneceſſary. The people at large would make choice of thoſe whom they deemed moſt able and willing to ſerve them. And certainly it does not follow, that a man muſt become diſaffected to the intereſts of his country, in conſequence of his acceptance of an office of honor or profit under the Crown. On the contrary,

a total excluſion of placemen, and more eſpecially of the great officers of ſtate from ſeats in parliament, would be attended with the moſt ſenſible ill effects, as having a direct tendency to eſtabliſh two ſeparate and hoſtile intereſts in the ſtate. The leading men in parliament, entertaining no hope of attaining to the great offices of ſtate themſelves, would exert their utmoſt influence to render them inſignificant and contemptible. The executive power would be gradually transferred to the legiſlative body; its functions would be exerciſed by parliamentary committees, and a republican ſyſtem, crude and indigeſted indeed, would be inſenſibly introduced. The monarch would be irritated by perpetual and often groundleſs oppoſition. Inſtead of being the conſtitutional guardian, and ſupreme executive agent of the community, he would become a political incumbrance, which it would be equally dangerous to caſt off or retain. Able and popular miniſters of ſtate, who have at the ſame time admiſſion into the cabinet councils of the monarch, and the legiſlative aſſemblies of the nation, and who, by mutual conſent, as it were, take the lead in both, form that conſtitutional bond of union between the two grand branches of government, which is neceſſary to maintain order and harmony in the ſtate. But if one ſet of men direct the executive, and another the legiſlative councils, a moſt dangerous rivalſhip will be created; the energy of the executive government will be weakened, and government itſelf expoſed to

contempt.

contempt. Liberty will firſt degenerate into licentiouſneſs, and it will be well if licentiouſneſs does not at laſt terminate in anarchy. Mr. Burke has, with peculiar abſurdity, ridiculed and traduced the new conſtitution of France, on the ground of its being a metaphyſical ſyſtem—as if it were poſſible to ſeparate metaphyſics from politics. Every wiſe and durable ſyſtem of polity muſt be founded on a comprehenſive and accurate knowlege of the principles of human nature; in other words, it muſt be theoretically juſt, in order to be practically beneficial, for the juſtneſs of the theory conſiſts preciſely and ſolely in its tendency to accompliſh its practical purpoſe. Whether every part of the French conſtitution, as eſtabliſhed by the conſtituent aſſembly, was indeed conſonant to that philoſophy of the mind, which is all that the obnoxious term *metaphyſics* denotes, may, I think, be juſtly doubted. Againſt the abuſes and encroachments of the executive power, terrified with the idea of returning deſpotiſm, they oppoſed inſurmountable barriers,—they heaped Oſſa upon Olympus, and Pelion upon Oſſa. But againſt the dangerous inroads of democratic caprice, of anger, or ambition in the legiſlative aſſemblies, the framers of this conſtitution ſeem to have thought no precautions neceſſary, and the monarch was left manifeſtly deſtitute of the means of ſupporting the authority, dignity, and efficiency, of the executive government. Such is man, that the love of power, and the deſire of extending and perpetuating it is inherent in his

nature,

nature, and therefore, under ſuch a conſtitution of government as ours, Mr. Hume very juſtly and ſagaciouſly remarks, "That the intereſt of the individuals, of whom the legiſlature is compoſed, muſt be oppoſed to the collective intereſt of the legiſlative body, naturally and inceſſantly ſeeking for occaſions and opportunities of aggrandizing itſelf at the expence of the executive power, which, unaſſiſted by *influence*, is in no condition to reſiſt its attacks."*

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* On the ſubject of government, the ſentiments of Mr. Hume merit high attention—His political reaſonings being at once bold and diſpaſſionate, perſpicuous and profound. This philoſopher, notwithſtanding his too indulgent repreſentation of the character and conduct of the kings of the Houſe of Stuart, was in *principle* a republican; and, in the famous eſſay which exhibits his IDEA of a perfect ſyſtem of polity, he recommends a government without LORDS, without BISHOPS, and without a KING. Senſible, however, that this ſyſtem is not calculated for this country, he ſatisfies himſelf, as a practical writer, with ſuggeſting certain alterations, by which the preſent form of government might be brought nearer to the moſt perfect model of limited monarchy. And in the firſt place, he inſiſts upon an EQUAL REPRESENTATION of the people in parliament. In the ſecond, the excluſion of the biſhops from the Houſe of Peers. And thirdly, the converſion of the temporal peers from hereditary legiſlators into ſenators for life, with the power of filling their own vacancies independent of the Crown, and including doubtleſs the eventual abolition of titles. Even then, he aſſerts, that "The PERSONAL CHARACTER of the MONARCH muſt too much INFLUENCE the GOVERNMENT;" and the dangerous prerogative of the ſword would ſtill be veſted in the king alone, who, ſays this ſagacious writer, "will always neglect the diſcipline of the militia, in order to have a pretence for keeping up a ſtanding army." Nor would this improved

The influence of the Crown, at preſent, extends, indeed, far beyond what is neceſſary to preſerve the balance of the conſtitution, and we do not now complain of a capricious or ambitious reſiſtance to the meaſures of the executive government, but of a blind and implicit *confidence* in their rectitude and wiſdom. Under a ſyſtem of efficient and general reform, a very great number, a countleſs catalogue, of ſuperfluous offices and ſinecures would be doubtleſs aboliſhed. And of thoſe which are really neceſſary, the Crown might be ſafely entruſted with the unreſerved diſpoſal. And, certainly, we muſt acknow-

improved ſyſtem, as Mr. Hume plainly intimates, be free from the evil of eſtabliſhing two ſeparate intereſts in the ſtate—"that of the court, and that of the country." Though of a temper mild and indolent, little calculated for active or ardent exertion, no man more clearly perceived that a ſtate of civil ſociety, far ſuperior to that which actually ſubſiſts, is in itſelf attainable. And no man knew better the unalienable rights of men, to adopt the moſt effectual means of advancing their own improvement and happineſs. Thoſe rights, which with unbluſhing effrontery, are, by the faſhionable writers of the day, declared not to exiſt, are by Mr. Hume pronounced "the only rights that are truly indefeaſible." Nor was this illuſtrious writer inſenſible to the dangers which menace the conſtitution from the increaſe of the regal power. "If," ſays he, "the danger of falling into a ſtate of republican anarchy be more terrible, that of abſolute ſubjection to the monarch is more imminent." And it will not, it cannot be denied, that the enormous addition of ten millions to the national taxation, together with the extravagant increaſe of the civil and military eſtabliſhments in this country, have no wiſe diminiſhed, but on the contrary, have moſt alarmingly heightened that tendency to deſpotiſm which exiſted in the opinion of Mr. Hume, when theſe obſervations were originally made.

lege,

lege, that the authority of the Crown might be as well, and the ſplendor of the Crown much better ſuſtained, at an expence incomparably leſs, if we conſider how large a proportion of the civil liſt revenue is appropriated to the payment of the ſalaries of ſuch as contribute nothing either to the one or the other. Since the eſtabliſhment of a free conſtitution in this country, the attention of the legiſlature has been far too much engaged in the diſcuſſion and contemplation of foreign concerns. Were the limits of the Britiſh empire commenſurate merely with the limits of the Britiſh iſlands, as at the acceſſion of the Houſe of Stuart, it is probable, or rather it is morally certain, that no real loſs would be ſuſtained. That the extenſion of territory, is a thing very different from the extenſion of power, Spain at this day, compared with what Spain formerly was, preſents a ſtriking and inſtructive inſtance. Could foreign commerce be ſecured without foreign dominion, it were folly to retain a ſingle detached poſſeſſion. And if the undivided attention, and entire reſources of the nation, were appropriated to purpoſes of national improvement, what a proſpect of happineſs and proſperity would be diſcloſed.

Let us for a moment imagine, that one half of the millions expended in a diſgraceful and fruitleſs attempt to ſubjugate America had been employed in national improvements and embelliſhments, what paradiſaical ſcenes might England at this time have exhibited! Can we not figure an Arcadian age reſtored,

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and "the ſublime dreams of PIRANESI" realized *? The revenues of a nation, when appropriated to works of national utility and magnificence, may be compared to moiſture exhaled by the ſun from the earth, and falling again in rich and refreſhing ſhowers. It is impoſſible to conceive to what heights of felicity and ſplendour a country like this might ariſe, were the aſtoniſhing reſources of which it is poſſeſſed devoted with fidelity, and wiſdom, to purpoſes of real and public utility. Under ſuch a ſtate of things, a perpetual and noble emulation of art and induſtry would be excited. Riches would accumulate with accelerated rapidity. All the agreeable and pleaſant accommodations of life would be far more generally diffuſed. Under a favourable and propitious influence, the intellectual faculties would open and ex-

* In lieu of the countleſs and incredible ſums raiſed on the people of this country ſince the acceſſion of the preſent family to the throne of Great Britain, in ſupport of a continual ſucceſſion of WARS—as if men, created only for mutual deſtruction, were eager to fill up the meaſure of their own miſeries—how infinitely more worthy of rational beings were it to employ ſome ſmall proportion, at leaſt, of the national riches, in the various modes ſo beautifully enumerated by the POET.

——————Make falling arts your care,
Erect new wonders, and the old repair:
Bid harbours open, public ways extend,
Bid temples worthier of the God aſcend.
Bid the broad arch the dangerous flood contain:
The mole projected break the roaring main.
Back to his bounds the ſubject ſea command,
And roll obedient rivers thro' the land.

EPISTLE TO LORD BURLINGTON.

pand;

pand; the human mind would become more vigorous and enlightened; the meaneſt claſſes of citizens would enjoy the bleſſings of liberty, and feel themſelves deſerving of it, and all would look up with grateful veneration to the government from which they derived theſe enjoyments. Let us conſider what Attica, in magnitude ſcarcely equal to an Engliſh county, once was, and then let us pronounce, if we can, what England might in time be. There is in the nature of man an inextinguiſhable principle of activity, delighting in the vigour of its own exertions, and productive either of the happieſt or the moſt pernicious effects, as it is ill or well-directed. Were the love of our country, and of mankind in general, to become, by a ſyſtematic and diligent culture, the ruling paſſion of the mind, how would that principle be ennobled, and combined with knowlege and wiſdom, how beneficially muſt it operate, and how extenſive would be its influence! The civil and political advantages we at preſent poſſeſs are, indeed, in a compariſon with the wretched governments of the ſurrounding countries, very great, and ought not to be lightly depreciated. But though the idea of ſeeking any eventual increaſe of public liberty and happineſs, by involving the community in ſcenes of actual contention and violence, is to be held in abhorrence; yet there is no juſt reaſon for concealing a firm and well-grounded perſuaſion, that the preſent ſyſtem is liable to great and obvious exceptions; nor can it be imputed as matter of blame to any one to propoſe

ſuch

ſuch meaſures as he deems conducive to the purpoſes of national benefit. On the contrary, it is the incumbent duty of every good citizen to promote, to the utmoſt of his power, and in every mode conſiſtent with the eſtabliſhed laws and conſtitution of his country, and in contempt of that cenſure and obloquy which he muſt expect to encounter, thoſe INNOVATIONS, which, upon a deliberate and impartial examination, he conceives to be real and neceſſary IMPROVEMENTS.

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In the interval of time which has elapſed ſince theſe remarks on the ſubject of Parliamentary Reform were written, the ſtate of public affairs has undergone a very material change. The Nation is involved in a War, which will inevitably occaſion rivers of blood to flow, and millions upon millions of treaſure to be expended; and of which, doubtleſs, the future page of Hiſtory, faithful to its truſt, will ſeverely inveſtigate the wiſdom and the juſtice. The queſtion now to be determined, is, whether this change is upon the whole favorable or unfavorable to the accompliſhment of that great object which the Miniſter himſelf will not heſitate to acknowlege in its own nature highly beneficial and deſirable. The attachment of all ranks and orders of men throughout the kingdom to the long eſtabliſhed forms of the Conſtitution, has recently diſplayed itſelf in ſo conſpicuous a manner, that it can no longer be pretended, with any degree of plauſibility, that the Conſtitution itſelf may

be endangered by a raſh and unſeaſonable effort to reform its abuſes, and to reſtore it to its original principles. If then it be admitted, that no danger is to be apprehended from within, it can ſurely with leſs color of reaſon be affirmed, that danger is to be apprehended from without. Such have been the wild and frantic exceſſes of the licentious democratic ſpirit which now prevails in France—and which it behoves us to remember, originated in an obſtinate and vehement oppoſition on the part of the ariſtocratic faction to the eſtabliſhment of a regular ſyſtem of reform—that the danger evidently is, leaſt we ſhould be deterred by a too ſcrupulous timidity from attempting to rectify thoſe abuſes which are known and acknowledged to exiſt, rather than that by a too violent effort we ſhould paſs the true and genuine limits of political diſcretion. A reform of the repreſentation is the foundation of all other ſafe and practicable reforms, and it is the only reform to which the public attention is at this time particularly called. Moſt certainly a ſimple motion of enquiry into the State of the Repreſentation has nothing in it to excite national alarm, though national alarm may perhaps eventually be excited by the artifices of thoſe who are intereſted to counteract every propoſition of reform. The notice given in the courſe of the laſt ſeſſion by Mr. Grey of his intention to bring forward this enquiry, does not appear by the innumerable addreſſes, reſolutions, and declarations ſince promulgated, to have excited any general apprehenſions

of

of danger; for in no one inſtance, I believe, has the propriety of reform been denied, or its policy queſtioned. On the contrary it has been virtually admitted, that abuſes do exiſt, and it has been affirmed, and it may be hoped, experience will evince the truth of the affirmation, that the Conſtitution is competent to the reform of its own abuſes. With what juſtice then can it be ſaid, that the ſenſe of the country at large, though allowed to be favorable to the idea of a Parliamentary Reform in the abſtract, is adverſe to the agitation of the queſtion in preſent circumſtances. By no public evil can it be inferred, that the ſenſe of the country is thus adverſe, and who has a right to *preſume* it—or to negative any propoſition tending to rational reform upon any ſuch gratuitous preſumption? The only unexceptionable mode of determining the real ſenſe of the country, is to bring the queſtion fairly and openly before Parliament, without any ſecret or ſiniſter attempt to influence the public mind. When it becomes by this means the theme of national diſcuſſion, the ſenſe of the public will be clearly aſcertained; and if thoſe who are convinced of the great national benefits ultimately to be derived from a Parliamentary Reform, and that it may be attempted in preſent circumſtances without hazzard, are not powerfully ſupported by the voice of the nation, it would be abſurd and prepoſterous to perſiſt in their exertions. They would doubtleſs wait a more favorable opportunity for the renewal of their attempt, and

the moſt favorable opportunity that can ever happen for this purpoſe, will, in all probability, be ſuch as every good Citizen muſt earneſtly deprecate and moſt ardently wiſh to avert—A CRISIS OF PUBLIC DISTRESS, CALAMITY, and CONFUSION, ariſing from the ruinous continuance of an IMPROVIDENT, UNPROVOKED, and UNNECESSARY WAR.

FINIS.

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